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TESTIMONY OF CLARE BOUQUET BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE, COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

FEBRUARY 20, 1980

I would like to express my gratitude to Congressman Royer and to the members of this subcommittee for giving me an opportunity to come here and for allowing me to speak to them on a subject which has, for some time, been very close to my heart. I believe I can speak for all the people who have been drawn close to each other in this tragedy when I say, "Please hear us!" I refer particularly to Beverly Oliver, who was asked to be here today, but is unable to leave the side of her husband, who became disabled by a stroke, suffered in the Pegasus Hotel in Georgetown, Guyana, on November 19, 1978. Beverly and Howard lost their two sons - their only children.

I want to especially thank Chairman Fascell for his kind words in his memorial address, delivered in Congress, in tribute to Leo Ryan. I quote from that address: "We pay tribute to a man who believed that every person was worth helping, and that every problem could, and should, be confronted." I implore all of you to confront the problem before us now, in the names of Leo Ryan, of my son Brian, and his wife, and of all the tragic victims of Jonestown.

It has been 15 months since that day when over 900 Americans died, in the jungle of Guyana. The shock and horror experienced by those of us who went to Guyana to attempt to see our family members and, if possible, bring them home, is still with us, and I think always will be.

Some segments of our society have dismissed them as a bunch of crazy fanatics, or a grotesque spectacle. But someone loved each one of them. They went to Guyana looking for some sort of promised land, and found themselves prisoners in hell.

The problem before us now, I believe, is discovering the real truth about what happened in Guyana. I think it has been over simplified, and it may take a very long time to unfold. However, I, for one, will not rest until I know for sure what really happened. I, personally, contributed 86 pages of

testimony to the Staff Investigative Group of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. I know of several others who did the same thing; yet, our specific testimony is included only in a classified edition of the report, which has not been made available to any of us. All we received was a 37 page report, with only very general statements about our testimony. The report states on page 29, and I quote, "The U.S. Embassy in Guyana did not demonstrate adequate initiative, sensitive reaction to, and appreciation of progressively mounting indications of highly irregular and illegal activities in Jonestown."

On page 39 it says, "Absent in the Embassy's dealings with People's Temple were the vital elements of common sense and an honest and healthy skepticism" We are talking about the loss of 914 lives, including a United States Congressman; not a simple mistake! The frustration I personally feel and felt, and I am certain others parallel me in their attempts to get help is overwhelming. I turned to everyone I could think of in any position of authority, from the President right down to direct appeals to the embassy officials in Georgetown, Guyana, dating back to March 1978 - nine months before my son was finally killed. I, myself, mailed copies of the affidavits of Yolanda Crawford and Debbie Layton Blakey, both of whom escaped from Jonestown, to Mr. Ellice, the U.S. Consul in Guyana. I asked in July 1978, for a team of inspectors to be sent into Jonestown to stay for several days, in order to accurately assess what was really true. I even sent a recent picture of my son and his wife, so that there would be no mistake about who the embassy officials were talking to, and so that they would know what they looked like before they left this country. I was told, in writing, by two consular officials, Mr. McCoy and Mr. Ellice, that a visit to Jonestown would occur about the end of August. No one actually went out there until November 7, one week before Leo Ryan's previously announced visit, along with the rest of us, to Guyana.

On Thursday, November 16, the day our group had an appointment with the ambassador, I called the embassy to inquire from Mr. Ellice why I had heard nothing since August. I was told by him that a visit had been made, and that a letter had been mailed to me at home. As we walked into the embassy, at 2:00, I was handed a letter regarding the November 7 visit to Jonestown, with Mr. Ellice's comment that evidently someone had "forgotten" to mail it.

In the State Department's own report on their performance in Guyana it states that quarterly visits had been set up to Jonestown, due to the allegations against the Temple. Why, then, did no one go out there for 6 months? I have heard it said that the trips were "delayed". What embassy business could possibly have been more urgent than a threat to the lives and well-being of over 900 Americans? The State Department points the finger at the embassy for, and I quote from the Foreign Affairs Report, "The lamentable breakdown in communications" and the embassy points back at the State Department. Where does the buck stop?

Who exactly is responsible? I think it's very commendable that the State Department is now implementing the recommendations of that Committee's report, by doing threat assessments before a Congressman visits a foreign country, by training consular officials in the psychological aspects of mind control, and so forth. But that won't help Leo or Brian or Maria Katsaris or any of the rest of them.

Finally, I would like to ask why, although I realize that the circumstances were somewhat different, were the lives of our hostages, including over 250 innocent children, not equally as important as those of the hostages in Iran? Why were they slaughtered without any help from anyone except one very brave Congressman? What will it take to put the puzzle together? When are we, in this country, going to start thinking about people as our number one priority, rather than oil. I'd rather get a horse, any day, than give up any of my children!

I ask this subcommittee to assist us in our pursuit of the whole truth of the story of Guyana.

Again, I wish to thank Congressman Royer and his able staff for their interest and assistance, and I thank this subcommittee in advance for the help which I feel sure they will not deny us.

Thank you.